2: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1949) 1956 FT7 Yao FT7

strike out with his adherents to found a new village. A sum of £6 or £7 is a considerable amount in everyday Yao life where the annual cash income of the average individual is not much more. The leader of a dissident group is prepared to forgo this wealth to get one foot on to the lowest rung of the political ladder—that is by becoming a village headman.

Obversely there is a great deal of sentiment attached to the idea of a united village. To the Yao way of thinking a village is broken by fighting or death, and these evils are linked by witchcraft beliefs. The association of death and the break-up of the village is brought out clearly by the funeral ablutions of villagers after the burial of one of their number. An important ingredient in the medicine with which the mourners wash themselves after the funeral, is *cikula*. It is the earth from a particular type of termitary which is usually about 12 to 18 inches high, upright and almost cylindrical. The crust is very brittle and it is comparatively easy to chip off a piece. When this is done a mass of internal chambers and passages is revealed. The soldier ants, unlike those of other species that retreat into the darkness of their passages as soon as they are exposed, come into the open daylight and swarm in confusion over the fractured termitary. When I questioned my informant about *cikula*, he kicked the crust off the top of one of the hills and said, 'See all the houses in the village of the ants? I have broken their village. So it is with death. It breaks the village.'

The Yao believe that death 'breaks the village' and that conflicts through sorcery lead to death. Therefore, conflicts are the real cause of village splits. Hence differences must be settled immediately if the village is to persist, because if they last too long one of the aggrieved parties is sure to start using sorcery against its opponents. Those who do move away, go to a distant place because they believe that sorcery operates only where there is social interaction. But the fear of sorcery on the other hand is just as strong a force in maintaining the physical unity of the village. It is while the migration is being planned that sorcery is most likely to be used. This is particularly so if the village break is taking the form of a lineage split. This happened, for example, in Lupunje village.

Kalambo, the sister's son of Lupunje, wanted to leave the village and had gone to seek a suitable site. When he returned he found that

3: Stannus D-5 (ca. 1912) 1922 FT7 Yao FT7

764 [114]

toward the east. After adjusting the body in its place, the *mbilo* would tear open the shroud over the ear, and pour on to the plans some powdered beads to be used by the dead man as money in the hereafter. Except in the case of chiefs, no objects were buried with the dead, contrary to Macdonald's description [1] of the Amangoche. The pole on which the body had been carried to the grave was broken into bits and together with any stick that had been used to measure the body for the cave, was placed in the grave. The opening into the chamber was then closed by a mat fastened over it by pegs and supported by pieces of wood. The *awilo* clambering out of the well, pushed the first earth backward into the grave with their elbows, after which the rest of the earth was shovelled in quickly, and a heap made at the surface. The ground about this mound was swept clean with a bunch of leaves by some one walking backward so that no footprints were left; the bunch of leaves was thrown on top of the mound. No medicine was put in the grave, nor were the household utensils placed on the mound, as Macdonald states concerning the Amangoche.[2] [114]

For some years past, the type of grave made among the Yao has resembled that of the Anyanja,[3] a long pit with a chamber scooped out along the whole length of one side. In this, the corpse is placed in a fully extended position so that it lies on its back with the feet toward the east. With this exception, the account given above holds good for the present day. The method of suspending the corpse in a mat slung on forked sticks within the grave, mentioned in *Africana*,[4] is not found among the Amachinga Yao.

764 783

On the way back to the village, two *awilo* lead, followed by the men, the women, and lastly, by the other *awilo*. First, all wash, the men upstream, the women downstream; no one may wash another's back. The hoes used in digging the grave are also washed; hoes are never washed on any other occasion.

[824]

During the funeral, some responsible old man is left in charge of the village with several younger men to assist him. Just before the return of the funeral party is expected, the old man sends one of the younger men to set medicine at the side of the path along which the mourners will pass. This medicine is made from the bark of the *mpingo* tree and is used for purification; it is placed in a sherd. Each person as he arrives at the spot squats down, dips the little finger of each hand into the medicine, and passes the fingers between the little toe and the third toe of the corresponding foot. The last comer throws any remaining medicine into the bush. As they near the village, a gun is fired and wailing is resumed for a few minutes, after which it ceases altogether. The old man who has been left in charge of the village always inquires whether all has gone well at the interment.

765

That evening, the time is passed in singing *chindimba*.[5] All those who attended the burial, sleep in the village, and if the deceased's relatives can afford to provide the necessary food, all remain in the village for a number of days equal to the period which elapsed between death and burial. Sometimes, when burial was long delayed, the mourning party

[1] Op. cit., vol. 1, p. 107.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Stannus, 'Notes on natives of British Central Africa,' op. cit., p. 313.
[4] Macdonald, op. cit., p. 109.
[5] Vide *infra*, p. 367, 370.

30 [548] that she is tattooed more profusely on the buttocks and legs. The circlet of beads was formerly made like *mapumbo* with a bark-cloth core, called *mbumbo* or *mbula* (*ku-wula*, to slip off), referring to the *mbula* being slipped off over the legs. The fashion now is to wear single strings of beads; each string is of one color but all the strings are different and perhaps number a dozen or more.

Lipamba: a bead belt three-inches wide, worn by Yao women near Lake Nyasa. A bead apron, *kacjara*, is also worn by them but not near Zomba (Pl. VI, fig. 2).

[783] A woman removes her beads when she is "unclean," that is: (*a*) during the menstrual period, (*b*) during the period of mourning for a near relative when coitus is forbidden, (*c*) before the birth of a child and afterwards until such time as she may resume intercourse with her husband.

[172] A large variety of beads has long been used by the Yao. There are some rarely seen now which were much prised in years gone by, while others are of quite recent introduction. There is no evidence that they themselves made beads and there are few which are probably not of European manufacture.

291 Clothing. The Yao used bark-cloth before the introduction of woven materials. The older people may still be seen in it and it is used in most of the ceremonies. At one time, they also used to weave a cloth called *likamambo* from a native cotton plant. This has been given up since the introduction of imported materials.

For the method of wearing cloth, see Pl. II, fig. 2. The very poorest people wear only a strip of calico round the pudenda, held in position by a string round the waist hanging long behind and in front; this is called *mitheka*. Yao women, when menstruating, wear [841] under this a little piece of cloth called *likumbi;* it is only worn at this time and not always as in certain other tribes.

721 Warfare. Fighting has naturally played a large part in the life of the Yao as among other African tribes, but at no time were these people a trained fighting race. Warfare was of a desultory character consisting mostly of raids by one feudal chief upon another. A party of men belonging to a chief at enmity with another, meeting some of his followers would challenge them, "*Alumbe*, who are you for?" The name of the rival chief in answer was the sign for battle to begin. A fake answer would never be given to gain an advantage. 726 When about to throw a spear, the thrower calls to his adversary.

The Yao have possessed guns for a long time. Going out to fight, the Yao used to [177] leap from one foot to the other, and spin their guns around in their hands. They made their own stocks for the rifles. They also used to make a small, cast-iron cannon about three feet long, called *kambula*, "a little nose." It was carried in the arms and was touched off by a torch. Drums called *ngoje* were taken into battle. There is an old war drum [534] at Malemya's village, taken in 1895 by the old Malemya from a Mang'anja chief called Mkulumbo who lived near Lake Chiuta. Since then, this drum has always gone into battle with Malemya. Around it his men would dance and anyone who had killed a man in battle would run up to it and spit upon it in salutation.

6: Mitchell E-5 (1946-1947) 1949 FT7 Yao FT7

ndembo, a woman who is pregnant for the first time;[1] *kavembere*, a woman who has one or two children; *mjembere*, a woman who has three or four children, and lastly, *ntolwe*, a woman who is past child-bearing age.

The information which I have been able to collect on abortifacients and contraceptives suggests that they are not used by married people merely to prevent their having more children, but that they are used by people who wish to avoid pregnancies which would be embarrassing, for example, by a woman whose husband is a labour migrant. To what extent the abortifacients and contraceptives are efficacious I cannot say; some, I know for certain, rely on a magical principle, for example, the medicated cord worn by a man during intercourse. On the other hand, the abortifacients taken orally may have some active ingredient.

A barren woman or an impotent man is regarded with some embarrassment and the marriage sureties (*ariamangorwe*) of a childless couple will go to considerable trouble and expense consulting diviners and leeches in an attempt to make their wards productive. Childless couples are regarded as not fully adult and are treated in a patronizing way by those who have borne children. Since a man may marry other wives, barrenness in a woman is a cause of sorrow to her husband, but is not in itself a ground for divorce. Where the man is impotent, however, the woman may divorce him on this ground, though she usually takes a paramour and forces her husband to an action for damages which automatically leads to a divorce because it is the usual practice in these cases for the court to ask the woman if she wants to be divorced from her husband.

In contrast to the satisfaction shown at the birth of a child is the sense of awe evinced when a child is still-born or the woman miscarries. The Yao do not distinguish between still-births and abortions, both events being known by the word *kwatanga*. This is a verb and refers to the process of abortion; there is no term for the dead foetus itself. I made no attempt to enumerate miscarriages and still-births because they are supposed to be due to breaches of sexual taboos on the part of the husband and wife, and interviewees were naturally reluctant to mention them. Miscarriages and still-births are greatly feared, and the woman is considered to be in a very dangerous condition until she and her husband have carried out a ritual purification. Should a man have intercourse with a woman who has miscarried and not yet been purified he will contract a disease called *lwazo* which is believed to be invariably fatal. Still-born children or aborted foetuses are buried in a hole dug with sharpened sticks in the bush by the women, whereas children who are born alive and die afterwards are buried in the graveyard in graves dug by men with hoes. The burial spots of still-born babies or aborted foetuses are marked with a stone or broken pottery, since it is believed that to step on them will induce an illness.

The concern of the interested kin-groups is shown in the child-birth procedure. Birth normally takes place in a hut in the presence of the older female relatives of the woman and the female representatives of the man. The husband's representatives are necessary because the Yao, like many other Central African peoples, believe that an adulterine child will not be born to the woman unless she confesses (*kupaca*) the name of the genitor. If she persists in concealing the identity of the genitor, they

[1] *ndembo* — elephant, hence ivory. The terms *litilo* and *ndembo* here both refer to the ivory beads traditionally worn by the woman in the pregnancy initiation ceremony.

10: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920)1922 FT7 Yao FT7

796 THE WHOLE VILLAGE IS THOROUGLY 'SPRING CLEANED', ALL RUBBISH
[364] is swept up, the ground round the houses is hoed clean, and the interiors remudded. Ceremonial beer is brewed by the head-wife of the chief, and after this has been drunk the ashes of the fire used in the brewing are carefully collected and taken to a *malebano* ("cross-roads," or "diverging of paths") where they are deposited.
[783] The chief, as representative of his people, bathes in special medicated water, a
[624] decoction made from the bark of *ng'wenyo* and *mbawa*, and the root of *mpingo*.
[621] This completes the ordinary annual ceremony, at which new fire is not made.

On certain special occasions a more elaborate ritual is carried out; such occasions are the death of a chief, a threatened epidemic of infectious disease, a murder (especially by shooting) and the frequent occurrence of quarrels in the village.

In such circumstances, in addition to the ordinary *pyajila* ceremony described above, the porridge sticks of the whole village are renewed and all fires extinguished. The discarded sticks and all ashes of the old fires are carried to the meeting of paths, where the former are stuck upright in the ground and the ashes piled together;
[372] this is done in procession, all the people taking part. On their return to the village new fire is made by friction by either the chief or his younger brother—usually the latter; fire procured in any other way would nullify the proceedings. Finally
[783] all the people bathe in the medicated water used only by the chief at the ordinary ceremony.

751 In addition to this special form of the *pyajila* ceremony, another rite is sometimes
796 performed after the occurrence of a murder or as prophylactic against the spread of epidemic disease. The doctor first makes a kind of trough (*lukwagwa*) from the bark of *mtondorobo* or *mpapa*, and procures a *chichililo* (or *chipengule*) basket—used as a strainer in salt-making. Having collected his medicines he proceeds to the bank of the stream near the usual bathing-place of the village and digs a shallow hole, in which he places the basket; in this he puts the leaves of a certain thorny shrub and covers the whole with the trough, which is banked up with earth so as to be perfectly firm. He then puts his "medicines" into the trough; these are, first, the head of an iron hammer and a piece of slag, both from a smelting furnace. On top of these he puts pieces of the root of a certain tree which has many and particularly sharp thorns, and bits of bark from two trees peculiar for having very straight stems. Having distributed these evenly along the floor of the trough, he fills it with water and then proceeds to construct an arch over the end of the trough furthest from the stream. Two long poles, cut from a kind of tree particularly rich in sap, are planted in the ground, one at each side of the trough and close to it; these are bent over towards each other, and fastened together by means of a strip of their own bark. A bamboo is now planted alongside each, and similarly tied to its fellow. During all these preparations and throughout the ceremony it is essential that the doctor has no knots in any part of his clothing.

The preparations are now complete, and when all the fires in the village have been extinguished the people go in procession to the spot where the doctor awaits them. All must be poorly clad and must have no metal about them.

[622] The chief opens the ceremony. He steps into the trough and taking some of
[769] the medicated water therefrom in his hands he rinses his mouth with it. He then offers a prayer to the spirits of his ancestors, first stating the emergency and detailing the measures which are to be taken to deal with it (new fires, sweeping, discard of porridge-sticks and shaving). The prayer over, he splashes the water in the trough over his body and passes through the arch, first throwing some gift (beads or, in more modern times, money) into the trough. These gifts, presumably
[756] intended as an offering to the spirits, are the perquisites of the doctor, and everybody is supposed to contribute in turn.

10: Sanderson D-5 (ca. 1920)1922 FT7 Yao FT7

The man and boys now pass through the arch in order of seniority; each splashes himself with the water in the trough, but neither speaks nor rinses the mouth. The women come next, led by the head-wife of the chief; the latter rinses her mouth and, instructed by the doctor, repeats a prayer similar to that offered by her husband. The remainder of the women merely splash themselves, like the men, before passing through the arch. All then return to the village, where the *pyajila* is continued.

Finally the doctor takes the hammer-head from the trough and hands it to the chief, who refits the haft into it, and, a hoe having been placed on the ground, goes through the form of forging the latter by beating it with the hammer. He then scrapes the ground with the hoe as if clearing a place overgrown with grass; he does not dig with it as in hoeing up the ground for planting seed. After this rite the chief again bathes in medicated water similar to that in the trough, and the ceremony is complete.

Whereas the *pyajila* ceremony and its adjunct, the rite of the arch, are now but rarely performed, no Yao will omit the rite of purification after a death in his family. This ceremony consists of two essential parts, both protective against the *ndaku*, a disease characterised by dropsy and supposed to be contracted by contact with a corpse, or by association, especially by sharing a meal, with those who have been in such contact. The first of these parts is bathing in certain medicines, which protects the bather from *ndaku*, and the second consists of a sort of communion meal, shared by all friends and especially relatives with those who have been contaminated, and designed to protect those friends and relatives.

The decoction for bathing is made by soaking the roots of *lugwalambati* and *lumlemela* in water, together with the bark of *mkomwa*, one piece each from the east and west aspects of the tree; the water assumes a reddish tint, and the whole body is bathed.

The communion meal consists of porridge made from any kind of flour or of rice, and some *ngunde* beans. In the latter some scorched and powdered root of *mtandanyelele* is mixed, with a little salt. All near relatives of the deceased must partake of this meal, as well as their wives and their near relatives; part is carefully put aside for the use of any relative unable to be present at the ceremony.

Latterly, since the spread of Islam among the WaYao, this rite has become confused with the distribution of food to the poor at the funeral of a Muslim, and the Arabic word *sadaka* ("charity") is now generally used for it, to the exclusion of its wider, correct meaning.

It may be mentioned here that after the death of a child the father is denied access to his wife for a period of about three weeks, and the first act must be one of *coitus interruptus*.

MEREDITH SANDERSON.